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CONSOLIDATED REPORT ON THE IMPLEMENTATION BY MEMBER STATES OF THE 1993 RECOMMENDATION ON THE RECOGNITION OF STUDIES AND QUALIFICATIONS IN HIGHER EDUCATION

OUTLINE

Background: In accordance with 177 EX/Decision 5 (I) and 34 C/Resolution 87, the Executive Board has monitored the implementation of the 1993 Recommendation on the Recognition of Studies and Qualifications in Higher Education. Pursuant to 187 X/Decision 20 Part II, the Director-General hereby submits a consolidated report on the implementation by Member States of this Recommendation. This report was examined by the Executive Board at its 187th session.

Purpose: This document provides an analysis of responses to a questionnaire issued to all Member States in May 2011 as well as of in-house resources on the implementation of the 1993 Recommendation on the Recognition of Studies and Qualifications in Higher Education. The information supplied by Member States also refers to the implementation of the regional and inter-regional Conventions on recognition in higher education.

Decision required: The General Conference is invited to adopt a resolution by which it decides to continue monitoring the 1993 Recommendation, particularly in the context of the revision of the regional and interregional Conventions on recognition in higher education.

BACKGROUND

1. Adopted by the 27th session of UNESCO's General Conference in 1993, the Recommendation on the Recognition of Studies and Qualifications in Higher Education (henceforth "1993 Recommendation") is the basis for an international framework to address interregional issues relating to recognition of higher education qualifications and quality assurance in the global context.

2. Following 177 EX/Decision 35 (I) of the Executive Board and 34 C/Resolution 87 of the General Conference, the UNESCO Secretariat monitors the 1993 Recommendation as a matter of priority. UNESCO assesses the implementation of the 1993 Recommendation primarily through monitoring the implementation of the regional and interregional Conventions on the recognition of studies, diplomas and degrees in higher education.

3. In compliance with the timetable for 2009-2013 of work of the Committee on Conventions and Recommendations of the Executive Board (CR) on the implementation of the standard-setting instruments for whose monitoring the Board is responsible (182 EX/Decision 31 and 184 EX/Decision 20), the implementation of this Recommendation was scheduled to be examined by the Executive Board at its 186th session. In order to allow the Secretariat to provide the most up-to-date and pertinent information to the Executive Board, as described in document 186 EX/19 Part III, the examination of the consolidated report on the implementation of this Recommendation took place at the 187th session of the Executive Board.

CONSOLIDATED REPORT AND COMMENTS FROM THE EXECUTIVE BOARD

4. The annexed document 187 EX/20 Part II presents to the General Conference the consolidated report prepared by the Secretariat based on the analysis of replies to a questionnaire issued to all Member States in May 2011, as well as in-house resources. The information supplied by Member States also refers to the implementation of the regional and inter-regional Conventions on recognition in higher education. As of 8 September 2011, the UNESCO Secretariat had received responses to the questionnaire from 25 Member States.¹ All UNESCO regions are represented in the group of responding Member States.

5. At the 187th session of the Executive Board, during the debate before the CR Committee, the Secretariat recalled that the Recommendation was adopted in 1993, when consensus regarding a universal Convention could not be achieved following the establishment of five regional and one interregional Conventions on recognition in higher education. Currently, one regional Convention has been revised (Europe and North America, 1997) and two are being examined and revised pursuant to 35 C/Resolution 11 (African States and Asia and the Pacific). The Secretariat further explained that the new generation of Conventions reflects a cross-regional alignment in principles for fair recognition and that each of them will be open for adoption by all UNESCO Member States. When all existing Conventions are revised and allow adoption by all Member States, there will be six de facto universal Conventions on recognition in higher education. The Executive Board discussed the difficulty of determining the equivalence of degrees and studies in higher education, given the great diversity of curricula, quality and rankings of different higher education institutions, and the importance of standardizing degree structures in all higher education systems.

¹ Belgium (French Community), Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bahrain, Brazil, Bulgaria, Canada, Cyprus, Fiji, Finland, France, Germany, Hungary, Israel, Japan, Kuwait, Latvia, Macedonia, Mexico, Monaco, Poland, Republic of Korea, Slovenia, Turkey, Uganda and Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of). Reports from Brazil, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Kuwait and Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of) are not included in the Annex as they were received by the Secretariat after the consolidated report was completed.

6. After examining document 187 EX/20 Part II and the report of the CR Committee thereon contained in document 187 EX/50 (paras. 15 to 17), the Executive Board invited the Director-General to transmit to the General Conference, at its 36th session, the consolidated report on the implementation by Member States of this Recommendation, together with comments by the Board as presented above.

PROPOSED RESOLUTION

7. In light of the foregoing, the General Conference may wish to adopt the following resolution:

The General Conference,

1. Recalling that at its 27th session (Paris, 1993) it adopted the Recommendation on the Recognition of Studies and Qualifications in Higher Education,
2. Recalling that at its 34th session (Paris, 2007) it identified the Recommendation on the Recognition of Studies and Qualifications in Higher Education as a priority to be monitored by the UNESCO Secretariat (34 C/Resolution 87),
3. Recalling document 177 EX/35, 184 EX/Decision 20 and 186 EX/Decision 19 Part III,
4. Takes note of the report on the implementation of the 1993 Recommendation on the Recognition of Studies and Qualifications in Higher Education;
5. Recognizes and welcomes the progress made in the implementation of certain items of the Recommendation, in particular the adoption of comprehensive policies and legislation on recognition;
6. Invites all Member States to strengthen their efforts to ensure the full and comprehensive implementation of the items of the 1993 Recommendation, to recognize knowledge as universal and a part of the common heritage of humankind, and to promote making knowledge and learning more accessible to each individual;
7. Invites the Director-General to:
 - (a) promote the development of institutional arrangements for implementation of the 1993 Recommendation through the six Conventions on recognition in higher education;
 - (b) provide effective technical support to Member States in need to facilitate this recognition across all regions; and
 - (c) continue monitoring as a priority the 1993 Recommendation, particularly in the context of the revisions to the regional and interregional Conventions on recognition in higher education.



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IMPLEMENTATION OF STANDARD-SETTING INSTRUMENTS

PART II

**APPLICATION OF THE 1993 RECOMMENDATION ON THE
RECOGNITION OF STUDIES AND QUALIFICATIONS IN HIGHER EDUCATION**

SUMMARY

In accordance with 34 C/Resolution 87, 177 EX/Decision 35, 184 EX/Decision 20 and 186 EX/Decision 19 Part III, the Director-General presents a report on the monitoring of the 1993 Recommendation on the Recognition of Studies and Qualifications in Higher Education.

This report is based on the analysis of replies to a questionnaire issued to all Member States in May 2011 as well as in-house resources. The information supplied by Member States also refers to the implementation of the regional and interregional Conventions on recognition in higher education.

Action expected of the Executive Board: Draft decision in paragraph 28.

Introduction

1. Adopted by the 27th session of UNESCO's General Conference in 1993, the Recommendation on the Recognition of Studies and Qualifications in Higher Education (henceforth "1993 Recommendation") is the basis for an international framework to address interregional issues relating to recognition of higher education qualifications and quality assurance in the global context.
2. At the time of the adoption of the 1993 Recommendation, five regional and one inter-regional Convention on recognition in higher education had been established. Consensus for a universal Convention for all regions was not reached; therefore, it was decided to move forward with a Recommendation on recognition of studies and qualifications in higher education.
3. The 1993 Recommendation calls for mutual recognition of studies and qualifications in higher education by all competent authorities and institutions. It provides for action by and cooperation among various stakeholders of higher education, particularly national/regional bodies and authorities, institutions of higher education, validating bodies and professional organizations. It also recalls the responsibility of Member States to provide education as a human right and emphasizes the need for concerted policy and planning.
4. The 1993 Recommendation is highly significant in that it stresses the fundamental understanding of knowledge as universal and a part of the common heritage of humankind, and it promotes making knowledge and learning more accessible to each individual. The Recommendation contains provisions for establishing mechanisms and procedures to harmonize degrees, qualifications and standards, ensure quality, and carry out fair and expeditious assessments of skills and competencies. The 1993 Recommendation also highlights the need for bilateral and multilateral international knowledge sharing, cooperation and coordination among governmental bodies and higher education institutions. This Recommendation reflects UNESCO's aim to promote access, equity and quality at systems and policy level worldwide.
5. Following 34 C/Resolution 87 of the General Conference, the UNESCO Secretariat monitors the 1993 Recommendation as a matter of priority. UNESCO assesses the implementation of the 1993 Recommendation primarily through monitoring the implementation of the regional and interregional Conventions on the recognition of studies, diplomas and degrees in higher education.
6. Currently, two of the regional Conventions, namely the 1981 Regional Convention on the Recognition of Studies, Certificates, Diplomas, Degrees and other Academic Qualifications in Higher Education in the African States (henceforth "Arusha Convention"), and the 1983 Regional Convention on the Recognition of Studies, Diplomas and Degrees in Higher Education in Asia and the Pacific (henceforth "Asia-Pacific Convention"), are being examined and revised pursuant to 35 C/Resolution 11.
7. In the context of the monitoring of the 1993 Recommendation, it is important to note that each future newly-revised regional Convention will be open for ratification by all UNESCO Member States. Each newly revised regional Convention also will follow the same basic principles for recognition in higher education as the other "new generation" Conventions on recognition in higher education.
8. As of 25 August 2011, the UNESCO Secretariat had received 20 reports from Member States.¹ All UNESCO regions are represented in the group of responding Member States. As the response rate is rather low, action should be taken by the UNESCO Secretariat and the Member States to improve it. The national reports vary in terms of the amount of information provided, level

¹ Belgium (French Community), Bosnia-Herzegovina, Brazil, Bulgaria, Canada, Cyprus, Fiji, Finland, Germany, Hungary, Israel, Japan, Latvia, Macedonia, Mexico, Poland, Republic of Korea, Slovenia, Turkey, Uganda. Reports from Brazil, Bulgaria, and Cyprus are not reflected in this report as they were received by the Secretariat after the consolidated report was completed.

of detail and structure. This report synthesizes the information provided by Member States in response to the questionnaire as well as in-house resources.

Implementation of the 1993 Recommendation

Parties to regional or inter-regional Conventions on recognition in higher education (1993 Recommendation Article 4)

9. Most Member States that responded to the questionnaire are Parties to the Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education in the European Region (henceforth “Lisbon Convention”). Two Member States are parties to other Conventions: Mexico to the Regional Convention on the Recognition of Studies, Diplomas and Degrees in Higher Education in Latin America and the Caribbean (henceforth “LAC Convention”); and the Republic of Korea to the Asia-Pacific Convention. Two Member States that submitted feedback on the questionnaire are parties to two different conventions on recognition in higher education: Bosnia and Herzegovina is party to the Lisbon Convention and the International Convention on the Recognition of Studies, Certificates, Diplomas and Degrees in Higher Education the Arab and European States bordering on the Mediterranean (henceforth “Mediterranean Convention”); Turkey is party to the Lisbon Convention and the Asia-Pacific Convention.

10. Three of the Member States responding to the questionnaire are not Party to any Convention on recognition in higher education. Among these, Japan will host the International Conference of States for the assessment and adoption of the newly-revised Asia-Pacific Convention (25-26 November 2011). The Conference is expected to be an opportunity to further encourage Member States in the region and beyond to re-assess and re-confirm their commitment to fair recognition in higher education. New Parties to the revised Regional Convention will increase the overall number of States Parties to Conventions on recognition in higher education.

11. All six Conventions on recognition in higher education have been signed by 133 Member States. Nearly 30 Member States are Parties to more than one regional or interregional Convention on recognition in higher education. This interregional cross-over is further encouraged by the future new generation of conventions, which will be open for ratification by any UNESCO Member State and which follow the same principles for fair recognition.

Policy and legislation (1993 Recommendation Articles 8-17)

12. Most Member States that responded to the questionnaire have legislation in place to support recognition in higher education. States Parties to the Lisbon Convention usually incorporate the principles or exact language of the Convention into national legislation. In Israel and Japan, sole authority for recognition of higher education credentials rests with the higher education institutions. The University Council of Japan contributes proposals to governmental policies on recognition.

13. In addition to legislation, there are instances of significant policy reforms: the Higher Education Globalization Strategy was implemented in the Republic of Korea to promote exchange of professors, researchers and students; Uganda has developed guidelines for the equation of degrees, diplomas and certificates; in Mexico, criteria have been developed to guide the process of recognizing studies. Many Member States have established or are in the process of establishing National Qualifications Frameworks and equivalency frameworks to ensure the recognition of prior learning.

Publicly accessible information on recognition in higher education (1993 Recommendation Article 18)

14. All Member States responding to the questionnaire indicate that lists or registries of legal, accredited higher education institutions are publicly available, usually on the website maintained by the Ministry responsible for higher education. States Parties to the Lisbon Convention also provide

this information on the European Network of Information Centres/National Academic Recognition Information Centres (ENIC/NARIC) website.² Several of the Member States responding to the questionnaire have also joined the UNESCO Portal on Higher Education Institutions;³ this resource is most valuable to Member States not signatory to the Lisbon Convention and which do not have the infrastructure of the ENIC/NARIC networks in place.

15. The 1993 Recommendation is often not acknowledged by the States Parties to the Lisbon Convention. In other regions, where the Convention on recognition in higher education has not yet been revised and an implementing infrastructure is not in place, the 1993 Recommendation is used in various ways to inform the public about recognition in higher education. In Japan, for example, the 1993 Recommendation was translated into Japanese and used to promote understanding of recognition in higher education.

Quality Assurance (1993 Recommendation Article 19)

16. Quality assurance (QA) in higher education has become a global concern. In the context of recognition, quality assurance is the basis upon which fair recognition is possible within Member States and internationally. All Member States responding to the questionnaire as well as those involved in the Bologna Process, and Member States with bilateral agreements on recognition in higher education, have established QA systems. Most commonly, QA is based on internal as well as external assessment. It is commonly linked with the accreditation process as a means to determine which higher education institutions can be included in a public registry of recognized institutions.

17. QA is a regional as well as a national concern. The report from Uganda clearly states that QA is considered a regional issue and a building block towards harmonization to promote global competition and mobility of students and lecturers. Nearly every UNESCO Member State is a member of a regional network on QA and thereby, beneficiary of the UNESCO/World Bank Global Initiative on Quality Assurance Capacity Building (GIQAC).

Information exchange for fair recognition (1993 Recommendation Article 20)

18. In many Member States, the ministry responsible for higher education handles inquiries from national and international parties regarding recognition in higher education. States Parties to the Lisbon Convention have established information centres specifically dedicated to recognition issues. National Information Centres for recognition in higher education are generally responsible for delivering opinions and information on documents of higher education obtained abroad, providing information on recognition procedures and the respective higher education system, and assisting applicants seeking recognition of higher education qualifications, and may conduct conferences or seminars on recognition issues.

19. UNESCO is co-secretariat with the Council of Europe to the European Network of Information Centres in the European Region (ENIC), while the European Commission is secretariat to the National Academic Recognition Information Centres in the European Union (NARIC). The ENIC/NARIC network is comprised of information centres of all 57 States Parties to the Lisbon Convention (10 are outside the European Region) and is an essential implementation tool to the Lisbon Convention.

International, interregional cooperation (1993 Recommendation Articles 21-23)

20. The most successful example of sustained international cooperation in the field of recognition is the ENIC/NARIC network. The network is in daily communication via a listserve to share information, conduct surveys and consult regarding policies and practice. The annual joint meeting and the regular working sessions of the secretariats, working groups, and bureau of the Lisbon

² <http://www.enic-naric.net>.

³ http://portal.unesco.org/education/en/ev.php-URL_ID=49864&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html.

Convention support a high level of professionalism and consistent capacity-building among the parties to the Lisbon Convention.

21. In the national report, Bosnia and Herzegovina, a member of the ENIC/NARIC network, draws a direct comparison between the Lisbon and the Mediterranean Conventions, and notes that the Mediterranean Convention network has no infrastructure (listserve, regular meetings) for the swift exchange of information.

22. Member States usually have bilateral agreements on academic exchange and recognition of higher education studies and qualifications. In an example of a multilateral agreement, Japan and the Republic of Korea reported together with China, on the initiative “CAMPUS Asia” to promote exchange among select universities in all three countries. Uganda noted a variety of projects with international partners addressing the issue of quality of higher education, notably the East African Common Market Protocol, which uses the Mutual Recognition of Academic and Professional Qualifications to promote free mobility of the labour force in the region.

23. It is commonly noted that recognition of degrees is less problematic between countries that share similar histories in the development of their higher education systems, for example among members of the Commonwealth. A common language or access to information in English helps facilitate recognition in higher education among countries with more disparate higher education systems.

The way forward – Future monitoring of the 1993 Recommendation

24. Most Member States responding to the questionnaire are States Parties to the Lisbon Convention and state that the Convention overshadows the 1993 Recommendation as the more recent, visible and stronger legal instrument for recognition in higher education. It should be noted that as of this report, the Lisbon Convention is the only regional Convention to have undergone revision. Furthermore, the ENIC/NARIC networks for implementing the Convention are active and well organized, with regular financial support and a stable infrastructure.

25. Meanwhile, in the absence of a universal Convention on recognition, the lack of perceived relevance of the old generation of Conventions and in light of the number of Member States not party to any of the existing Conventions on recognition, the 1993 Recommendation remains relevant at this time as a normative instrument connecting all regions and serving all Member States. The monitoring exercise is also a way to raise awareness of the Recommendation in Member States. For example, Fiji expressed that the questionnaire was informative on various aspects of the Recommendation and the need to formalize arrangements with regard to recognition in higher education. UNESCO will continue to monitor the 1993 Recommendation as a priority (34 C/Resolution 87) via questionnaires and reporting by all Member States.

26. The 1993 Recommendation will be monitored via the regional and inter-regional Conventions on recognition in higher education. The Republic of Korea states the hope that the future revised Asia-Pacific Convention will provide a basic framework to promote multi-lateral networks and cooperation rather than solely bilateral partnerships in the region. The new generation of Conventions promotes principles of fair recognition by requiring the demonstration of substantial differences if recognition is denied. Furthermore, the future revised Conventions, which address new dynamics in higher education since the 1970s and 1980s such as massification, diversification and globalization, will be open for ratification by all Member States, thus serving as inter-regional instruments to support the global mobility of students and graduates in addition to the 1993 Recommendation.

27. The three oldest Conventions – LAC Convention (1974), the Mediterranean Convention (1976) and the Convention on the Recognition of Studies, Diplomas and Degrees concerning Higher Education in the Arab States (1978) – are not subject to a revision process. UNESCO will support the revisions of these three conventions in a timely way as appropriate.

Action expected of the Executive Board

28. In light of the above, the Executive Board may wish to consider the following decision:

The Executive Board,

1. Having examined document 187 EX/20 Part II and the report of the Committee of Conventions and Recommendations on the application of the 1993 Recommendation (187 EX/...),
2. Invites the Director-General to transmit document 187 EX/20 Part II to the 36th session of the General Conference along with the comments of the Executive Board thereon;
3. Recommends that the General Conference adopt the following draft resolution:

The General Conference,

1. Recalling that at its 27th session (Paris, 1993) it adopted the Recommendation on the Recognition of Studies and Qualifications in Higher Education,
2. Recalling that at its 34th session (Paris, 2007) it identified the Recommendation on the Recognition of Studies and Qualifications in Higher Education as a priority to be monitored by the UNESCO Secretariat (34 C/Resolution 87),
3. Recalling 177 EX/35, 184 EX/Decision 20 and 186 EX/Decision 19 Part III,
4. Takes note of the report on the implementation of the 1993 Recommendation on the Recognition of Studies and Qualifications in Higher Education;
5. Recognizes and welcomes the progress made in the implementation of certain items of the Recommendation, in particular the adoption of comprehensive policies and legislation on recognition;
6. Invites all Member States to strengthen their efforts to ensure the full and comprehensive implementation of the items of the 1993 Recommendation, to recognize knowledge as universal and a part of the common heritage of humankind, and to promote making knowledge and learning more accessible to each individual;
7. Invites the Director-General to:
 - (a) promote the development of successful infrastructure for implementation of the 1993 Recommendation through the six Conventions on recognition in higher education;
 - (b) provide effective technical support to Member States to facilitate recognition across all regions; and
 - (e) continue monitoring as a priority the 1993 Recommendation, particularly in the context of the revisions to the regional and interregional Conventions on recognition in higher education.